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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (February 10-26, 2007)

¶1. (U) Summary: Post presents the fourteenth edition of Northern Uganda Notes to provide information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission's objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES
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¶2. (U) The Juba peace process and direct discussions between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) remain stalled. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) is due to be reviewed on February 28. The GOU says it will not renew hostilities against the LRA. The LRA's second-in-command, Vincent Otti told AFP on February 24 that the LRA would not renew the agreement but also would not resume hostilities. Otti complained that the UPDF was attacking "my boys east of the Nile River and that from now on, we will defend ourselves." The UPDF, which is providing security in southern Sudan, maintains that the CHA designates areas for the LRA. Any LRA outside those areas are "fair game," according to Felix Kulaigye, the UPDF spokesperson.

¶3. (U) Meanwhile, press reports indicate that Kony and Otti have left Garamba National Park and are at the border area of Central African Republic (CAR). Otti denies that the LRA have entered CAR. LRA spokesman Obonyo Olweny stated "there is no military gain in moving to CAR at the moment."

¶4. (SBU) An analysis based on interviews with a close associate of Kony is receiving wide distribution within the Ugandan government and in diplomatic circles. It states that Kony is not genuinely committed to a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Despite frequent references to the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as an obstacle to a negotiated settlement, the source contends that the LRA was using the issue as a diversion to buy time while planning for future hostile actions. The analysis recommends that the talks must provide real amnesty, integration, and viable economic alternatives for the rank-and-file LRA combatants or else they will return to life in the bush. For the LRA leaders, there is no place to go because if they sign a deal, the LRA ceases to exist and they must be offered a situation, such as exile, that is better than a return to the bush war. The analysis also recognizes the potential value of third parties -- local elected leaders, civil society, traditional and religious leaders -- in working with the GoU to win over the LRA. It warns, however, that third parties must

speaking with one voice and that when they do not, they become disruptive and should be removed.

15. (U) USG Activities: Ambassador Browning discussed the current situation in northern Uganda and options regarding the peace process with International Crisis Group (ICG) Director John Prendergast and former mediator, Betty Bigombe, on February 9. Prendergast and Bigombe shared the following impressions after a week in the north: (1) There was overwhelming support among IDPs for Kony and Otti to go into exile while the rank-and-file fighters take amnesty. (2) IDPs are losing hope that the LRA will agree to peace. (3) The LRA has been trying to mobilize past collaborators and previously rescued members to rebuild its ranks. (4) The LRA negotiators do not represent northern interests.

16. (SBU) ICG fully understands the negative dynamics of the talks. However, ICG believes the value in keeping the talks going is the reduction in the level of the conflict. Prendergast was looking for ways to move the process forward and potential points of leverage over the LRA. ICG recommends direct engagement of Kony over a deal that provides him future security and a livelihood, perhaps third-country exile and a community-backed accountability mechanism. ICG believes that squeezing the LRA's financial backers, especially starting the process of closely scrutinizing members of the diaspora's ties to Kony and Otti, is the logical next step. In addition, Prendergast noted that an open and transparent planning process for a concerted military strike by Uganda, Congo, Southern Sudan, and MONUC could help alter the LRA's perceptions of its options.

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SECURITY UPDATE
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17. (U) Most security concerns in recent weeks have focused on Karamoja and the sub-counties of Pader, Lira, Amuria and Katakwi districts that border the Karamoja region. At Monday's meeting of the Joint Monitoring Committee, for example, the Kitgum district Chairperson reported four deaths and ten wounded this month as a result of cattle raids from Kotido. The Chairs of Lira, Katakwi and Amuria voiced similar concerns, and all recommended greater efforts at inter-communal peace building aimed at "disarming the Karimojong mentally."

18. (U) The situation in the LRA-affected areas has remained quiet. Kitgum's District Security Officer reported that for the last month there were no reports of LRA movement inside the district or any violent acts committed by the Karamojong. Nevertheless, major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are restricting travel between March 1-5, after the latest Cessation of Hostilities Agreement expires. The District Disaster Management Committee and UPDF in Kitgum disagree on declaring additional areas open for resettlement. The UPDF spokesman reportedly told the committee that "we are preparing for war."

19. (U) In contrast, Gulu Resident District Commissioner Walter Ochora assured IDPs that they do not need to go back to camps and that the UPDF will provide security whether or not a peace agreement is signed. The Amuru District Chairperson reported the security situation as normal, and that people have started returning to their homesteads. Humanitarian organizations estimate 400,000 IDPs are on the move to new sites throughout the Acholi Sub-region. Few have returned all the way home (3,297). The World Food Program's revalidation exercise confirmed 700,000 IDPs in Gulu and Amuru districts.

110. (U) The judiciary's program to eliminate backlogged court cases and decongest prisons in northern Uganda will begin another round of court sessions in five cities on March 5. Principal Judge James Ogoola will join seven other judges to hear cases in Gulu, Kitgum, Soroti, Lira, and Kumi for a two-month period. The judges will handle 534 cases. The Prime Minister's Office is using 215 million shillings (USD equivalent) to fund the exercise from the Humanitarian Emergency Action Program for Northern Uganda.

¶11. (U) A similar exercise undertaken by the "Gulu Civil Court Sessions" was a joint project between the High Court of Uganda and Restore International, a U.S.-based NGO. From October-November 2006, six judges heard 104 of 140 cases in Gulu to start clearing out the backlogged cases. Until recently the courts were unable to sit due to insecurity in the north, resulting in a build-up of hundreds of cases. Restore International supported U.S. law students to prepare the case briefs for the judges. World Bank funding will be used for reconstruction and furnishing of courts in the north.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY
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¶12. (SBU) Local government officials have requested that all humanitarian assistance organizations submit budgets for incorporation into the overall district plans to enhance coordination, effective reconstruction, and targeting of funds. District officials say that they cannot operate properly in the presence of a "parallel government." In Gulu District, over 140 NGOs have complied.

¶13. (U) Another aspect of the problem is poor coordination between the central government and local officials. To ensure proper exchange of information and coordination by the Prime Minister's office, the Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees has asked all major humanitarian donors to report on agencies, by what kind of assistance in which districts, and has asked the districts to report in detail down to sub-county level.

¶14. (U) A key challenge for humanitarian organizations is to sustain existing services, at the same time they rehabilitate where populations movements are occurring.

¶15. (U) USG Activities: USAID's health team spent a week in Gulu coordinating the Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS, and TB (NUMAT) project with partners. The program will assist in the delivery of services to IDPs and returnees. The team also visited other USG-funded projects that provide assistance to caregivers for orphans and vulnerable children, a day care center for young mothers returning from conflict areas, and youth HIV/AIDS prevention

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programs.

¶16. (U) USAID's Democracy and Governance team leader visited Oyam District to monitor progress on the Strengthening Decentralization in Uganda Program from February 12-13. The new district's leaders are not waiting for donors to help resettle the 140,000 (out of 250,000) residents living in IDP camps. The local government has cultivated cassava plans to distribute to returning families along with basic tools. The district officials also plan to give vouchers to individuals who help rebuild area roads. The vouchers could be used to obtain oxen and plows. The district plans to invest heavily in infrastructure repair to help farmers get crops to markets. With their limited resources, districts will be able to meet but a limited number of returnees' needs.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB
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¶17. (U) Uganda Conflict Action Network (Uganda-CAN) is mobilizing a telephone-call campaign on March 1 to place pressure on Congress for the U.S. Government to take a more active role in the peace process. Uganda-CAN also published an editorial in the Government-run New Vision newspaper on February 13. UGANDA-CAN states that the "current intractability of the situation can also be blamed on the international community, which has retained a largely passive

position. The current impasse highlights the critical need for external confidence-building, inducements, sanctions and technical assistance to rejuvenate the peace process. Among other actions, the international community could strengthen the Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team, inject accountability into the process, assist the mediator, sanction "spoilers" in the LRA external wing, and bolster security for the displaced. Generic statements from the diplomatic community do not go far enough; only serious action will bring regional stability in not only Uganda, but also Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo."

¶18. (U) On February 14, a Government of South Sudan press release issued after a meeting between the President of South Sudan and Ugandan Interior Minister Rugunda stated that there was considerable support for the GOSS's continued mediation role from the international community. The press release also said that this support "included specific support from the Government of the United States of America for the continuation of the Juba peace process." The statement praises Kenya and South Africa for showing solidarity with the Juba process.

BROWNING